

## STYLE AND IDEOLOGY: THE COLD WAR 'BLEND' IN GREECE

**Abstract:** This paper describes cultural policy in Greece from the end of World War II up to the fall of the *junta* of colonels in 1974. The writer's object is to show how the Cold War favoured defeated Western countries, which participated effectively in the globalisation of American culture, as in the Western world de-nazification was transformed into a purge of communism. Using the careers of three composers active in communist resistance organizations as examples (Iannis Xenakis, Mikis Theodorakis and Alecos Xenos), the writer describes the repercussions of this phenomenon in Greek musical life and creativity.

**Keywords:** Iannis Xenakis, Mikis Theodorakis, Alecos Xenos, Avant-garde music, Greece.

The Second World War, the Cold War, and the civil wars that broke out in the *imminence* of peace, have lately moved from the sphere of politically coloured discussions to the sphere of history.

New aspects are examined, with an awareness that people who lived through those events have been left out of histories, and that if they had been taken into account, all three kinds of war would not be considered as having ended with the signature of treaties.

This paper deals with the exclusion of the Greek people from the country's history, specifically its cultural history; it investigates cultural policy in Greece from World War II up to the fall of the *junta* of the colonels (1969–74), a policy dependent on western dominant powers, which included countries that had lost the war. Germany acted as a promoter of the new western (American) culture in Greece.

One could measure a country's dependency on foreign powers and its contribution to world culture by the percentage of its people left out of history and by the degree of ineptness applied to fit its history into circulating ideas.

Numerous theories that appear daily in musicological texts are adopted instantly, paving the way to the blunting of identity differences. Events and situations are adapted, often clumsily, to new theories. Evidence of these forced adaptations is the use of English terms 'that cannot be translated', or, if translated, are clarified with the English word in parenthesis. This habit is at times amusingly frustrating. Since Greek language is still producing international terms, one might often see in Greek

texts, Greek words explained in parenthesis with their English transliteration, such as: ‘τόπος (topos)’, which should be further clarified and extended to ‘τόπος (topos (τόπος))’.

Care has been taken to ensure that the following narration will not be procrustean.

During the war, the communists’ domination over resistance groups, and the general propensity towards the Left in Europe, resulted in the unprecedented popularity of the communists in Greece – whose party had been completely dissolved and disorganized during the dictatorship of Metaxas (1936–41).<sup>1</sup>

The National Popular Liberation Army (ELAS),<sup>2</sup> one of the most massive resistance groups in Europe, and its branch, the National Liberation Front (EAM)<sup>3</sup> undertook the organization and distribution of food, hygienic care, and the education of common people. Many Greeks in remote villages had never before experienced such attention from state centres.<sup>4</sup>

Education and culture was primarily the work of the youth organization EPON<sup>5</sup> which was founded on 23 February 1943.

Theatrical and musical representations were given on improvised stages in villages, where the participation of the villagers themselves was encouraged. For many Greeks, this was the first and last time they had ever seen theatre.<sup>6</sup>

Many artists and intellectuals, influential after the war, had been members of EAM and EPON. Three composers among them will be presented here as examples of how the different roads they had chosen to follow were affected.

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<sup>1</sup> See, Γιώργος Μαυρογορδάτος, ‘Μεταξύ δύο Πολέμων. Πολιτική Ιστορία 1922–1940’, in: *Ιστορία του Νέου Ελληνισμού 1770–2000*, vol. VII (Athens: Ελληνικά Γράμματα, 2003), 9–32:31.

<sup>2</sup> ΕΛΑΣ = Εθνικός Λαϊκός Απελευθρωτικός Στρατός.

<sup>3</sup> ΕΑΜ = Εθνικό Απελευθερωτικό Μέτωπο.

<sup>4</sup> All historic information not related to music in this paper is – unless otherwise stated – from: Mark Mazower, ‘Introduction’, in Mark Mazower (ed.), *After the War was over. Reconstructing the Family, Nation and State in Greece, 1943–1960* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3–23.

<sup>5</sup> ΕΠΟΝ = Ενιαία Πανελλαδική Οργάνωση Νέων = Uniform Pan-Hellenic Youth Organization.

<sup>6</sup> With the exception of a few areas in Peloponnesus and Thessaly, where theatrical performances were given by the ‘Arma Thespidos’ (modelled on the fascist ‘I carri di Tespi’ and the Nazi ‘Wanderbühnen’), which was founded in September 1939 under the Ioannes Metaxas dictatorship. See, Γιάννης Κ. Μπασιτιάς, *Ο Κωστής Μπασιτιάς στα Χρόνια του Μεσοπολέμου. Μεσοπόλεμος Κατοχή Απελευθέρωση*, vol. I (Athens: Εκδοτική Αθηνών, 1997), 73.

They are Iannis Xenakis (1922–2001) who became an international figure of avant-garde music; Mikis Theodorakis (1925–), whose vocal music, based on high quality Greek poetry and traditional music, has experienced great and long lasting popularity in Greece and has deeply influenced Greek music as well as political life; and Alecos Xenos (1912–95), a trombonist and composer of popular resistance songs and incidental music for EPON theatrical performances, as well as symphonic music influenced by Soviet composers.

Xenos was the more faithful to Soviet culture and conformed more to the lines drawn by the Greek Communist Party. He criticized Theodorakis for having propagated, through musical quotations, the *rebetika*. To his view, those popular urban songs of obscene and immoral content, should not have been presented as songs of the Greek people. Xenos believed that the Greek people would some day become familiar with the symphonic works of the Greek National School, and he worked to that end.

When the Germans left in 1 October 1944, the entire country was under the National Liberation Front. Communists were now the most important political and social force in the country. The British, to whose sphere of influence Greece was entrusted (in an agreement between Churchill and Stalin of which Greek communists were not aware) had supported and collaborated with EAM/ELAS because of their effectiveness in military operations. British politicians, however, anxious to put in order the situation after the war, formed EDES<sup>7</sup> –a counterbalancing anti-communist resistance group–, and collaborated for some time with both, finally watching the two groups fighting each other.

Concurrently, the British were building connections with the gendarmerie and other nationalist units and were paving the way for the return to power of Nazi collaborators.

The communists welcomed Georgios Papandreou as Prime Minister, when he returned from exile, and participated in his government. Obeying Russia, they did not move to seize power. Gradually, mistrust grew between the leaders, who had the support of the British, and among many resistance fighters.

Then in December 1944 a demonstration in the streets of Athens ended with several deaths, British soldiers enclosed in the Grande Bretagne Hotel, appropriately, and British jets bombarding leftist positions in suburbs of the city.

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<sup>7</sup> ΕΔΕΣ = Εθνικός Δημοκρατικός Ελληνικός Σύνδεσμος = National Democratic Greek League.

After the fighting was over in January 1945, peace terms were agreed in Varkiza in February 1945.

A period of ‘rehabilitation’ began, which purged civil services not of Nazi collaborators, but of communists and heroes of the Resistance. It was one of the earliest cases of this mutation that became the norm during the Cold War on the western side of the Iron Curtain.<sup>8</sup>

To shorten the story, the communists formed armed groups again and the Greek Civil War broke out, which Mark Mazower characterized as the bloodiest conflict in Europe from 1945 until the break-up of Yugoslavia.<sup>9</sup>

In 1949 the war ended with the defeat of the communists.

In 1950 the country was at peace. This was peace where hatred, fear, pain and poverty reigned. Communists and leftists were persecuted. Many left the country or went to its northern borders. Thousands were interned in island camps and prisons.

In 1944 Xenakis was wounded on the left side of his face, in Athens. In February 1946 he completed the Polytechnic School. In September 1947 he deserted the army (where he would have been fighting against his comrades) and left Greece.

In July 1947 Mikis Theodorakis was arrested and sent to camps on the islands of Ikaria and Macronesos, where he was badly injured by torture.

Alecos Xenos joined the EAM in 1941. He worked for the organization of music ensembles throughout the country and wrote numerous resistance songs that became very popular. His was the first Greek resistance song. Also, according to him, his *Εισαγωγή Λευτεριάς* [*Freedom Overture*] was the first anti-Nazi or anti-fascist symphonic work in the world.<sup>10</sup> It was performed, under a misleading title, by the Greek Radio Orchestra and the Athens State Orchestra.<sup>11</sup> The latter was the first state symphonic orchestra of Greece and was founded under the Nazis in

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<sup>8</sup> Toby Thacker gives an eloquent description of this mutation in Western Germany, in combination with the support of avant-garde music the Germans were ‘forced’ to give. See, Toby Thacker, *Music after Hitler, 1945–1955* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 229.

<sup>9</sup> Mazower, ‘Introduction’, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Xenos has noted down this on the title page of the score. See, Διονύσης Μπουκουβάλας, ‘Κατάλογος Έργων Αλέκου Ξένου (1912–1995)’, *Μουσικολογία*, 18 (2003), 164–207:192.

<sup>11</sup> *Εισαγωγή Λευτεριάς* [*Freedom Overture*] was first performed on 23 October 1941 by the recently founded National Radio Orchestra, under the title *Συμφωνική πεζογραφία – Παραλλαγή σ’ένα Ελληνικό Θέμα* [*Symphonic prose – Variation on a Greek Theme*]. See, *ibid.*

1942, because, before that, no Greek government had understood the necessity. Among Greek musicians who grasped the opportunity offered by the music loving conquerors, and worked to pass the law of the orchestra's foundation, was Xenos himself, the musician of the resistance!<sup>12</sup>

In 1952 the program of 'national rehabilitation' was completed.

Theodorakis returned to his studies in the Athens Conservatory of Music and received his diploma in composition. He went to Paris in 1954 where he studied with Messiaen and others. He composed a number of symphonic works that were successfully performed in the West. But in 1960 he changed direction, composing vocal works based on modern Greek poetry, conceived to attract a vast Greek public. Those popular cantatas, oratorios and song cycles brought his fame to heights that no musician had ever known before in Greece.

In 1951 Xenakis met Messiaen, whose advice and encouragement propelled his lonely but successful international career.

In the 1950s a second phase of 'rehabilitation' begun, undertaken by foreign powers, victors and defeated together.

In 1951 the Italians founded the Instituto Italiano di Cultura in Atene.

In 1952 the United States Information Service initiated concerts and conferences of modern (mostly American) music.

The Marshall Plan had ended in 1951, and the economic stabilization of Greece relied thereafter upon West Germany (the country that had obliterated its economy<sup>13</sup>), with whom diplomatic relations were resumed at the end of 1950.

The Germans negotiated economic support in conjunction with a noiseless solution of the war-crimes issue. Economic support contained a not very noiseless propagation of cultural products in Greece.

The Goethe Institute was established in Munich in 1951 in order to spread German language and culture abroad. Its first branch was estab-

<sup>12</sup> In contrast to other non-leftist musicians who collaborated with the Germans for the foundation of the Athens State Orchestra, Alecos Xenos, never tried to conceal his contribution. See, his interview given to the composer Stephanos Vassiliades in 1987, published in: Αλέκος Ξένος, 'Για τον Άγγελο Σικελιανό και τα Μουσικά Ζητήματα του Τόπου' *Αλέκος Ξένος (1912–1995). Επτανησιακά Φύλλα*, xxv/3–4 (Autumn – Winter 2005), 485–490:488.

<sup>13</sup> The 'seizure of the financial wealth of Greece' already occurring during the first weeks of the occupation, is described in Mark Mazower, 'Ο Λιμός', *Στην Ελλάδα του Χίτλερ. Η Εμπειρία της Κατοχής*, translated by Κώστας Κουρεμένος (Athens: Αλεξάνδρεια 1994), 49–78.

lished in Athens the following year. According to H.A. Oehler, working in the Athens institute in 1980, the aim of the Goethe Institute in Athens was ‘the collaboration of Greek and German specialists in contemporary music and jazz’.<sup>14</sup>

This blend is certainly not very representative of German culture. It showed though that, as stated by Toby Thacker, ‘the goal of internationalising German music was [...] hugely successful’<sup>15</sup> or, to fill in the gap in that statement, it showed that German music was successfully internationalized after its hugely successful Americanisation.

Commenting on John Cage’s remark that ‘Europe will and must give up being Europe for the world is one world now’, Alan Sinfield says: ‘One world is in actuality, a world dominated by the United States; and United States modernism, thus understood, merges internationalist and chauvinist criteria, folding the two so that world culture is United States culture’.<sup>16</sup>

So, in essence, the Goethe Institute aimed to propagate American music in Greece. In 1956 Günter Becker began teaching in Athens.<sup>17</sup> In 1962 he founded the Workshop of Contemporary Music in the Goethe Institute in collaboration with Yannis Papaioannou, a leading figure in the promotion of avant-garde music in Athens. Papaioannou founded an Hellenic Association of Contemporary Music, as well as the Greek branch of the International Society for Contemporary Music (both in 1965). He organized a number of avant-garde music concerts, supported by foreign institutions in Athens and by the Greek Tourism Organisation, which is up to this day responsible for the Festival of Athens (inaugurated in August 1955), this being one proof that the Greek state is interested in exhibiting rather than cultivating culture. It should be stressed that the public of New Music in Greece formed a minor part of the small public of serious music.

The first TV station in Greece was established in 1966 by the Greek Armed Forces, as if to prepare for the coming of the *junta* of colonels the following year (21 April 1967) and to facilitate their propaganda.

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<sup>14</sup> H.A. Oehler, ‘Ινστιτούτο Goethe Αθηνών’, *Χρονικό ‘80* (Athens: Ωρα, 1981), 73.

<sup>15</sup> Thacker, *Music after Hitler*, 226.

<sup>16</sup> Alan Sinfield, ‘The Migration of Modernism: Remaking English Studies in the Cold War’, *New Formations*, 2 (Summer 1987), 111; quoted in: Ian Wellens, *Music on the Frontline. Nicolas Nabokov’s Struggle against Communism and Middlebrow Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 118.

<sup>17</sup> He taught music in *Anavryta*, the school attended by the royal family (1956–1958) and at the Goethe Institute (1957–1968).

A new round of imprisonments, prosecutions, and island camps began for people with a great variety of political ideas, communism included.

Theodorakis, arrested in 1967 and confined, was permitted to leave the country after a worldwide campaign by famous personalities (including Dimitri Shostakovich, Leonard Bernstein, Laurence Olivier, Yves Montand, and Arthur Miller). He lived in exile from 1970 to 1974, performing his music around the world and directing universal attention towards the Greek Cause. His songs and popular oratorios, though prohibited in Greece, were miraculously widespread, instilling enthusiasm and accompanying every revolt before the final fall of the *junta*.

Avant-garde music continued to be backed during the *junta* and a number of concerts were organized with music by both foreign and Greek composers, some of whom had left Greece either to study or to escape capture, or both; a great number of young composers attracted to avant-garde music were politically at the Left. It was considered absolutely normal and natural that people of progressive, revolutionary etc ideas would compose progressive, revolutionary etc. music.

New generous benefactors appeared, such as the Ford Foundation, which paid both for avant-garde music (for scholarships, concerts and commissions of works) and for concerts, editions and recordings of Greek folk music, to satisfy the colonels' cultural interests and help them with their propaganda. As for the Athens State Orchestra, its director responded much too readily to the dictators' requests to perform at their nationalistic feasts and dinners. Alecos Xenos did not participate; he was dismissed from the orchestra, because of his 'political views'.<sup>18</sup>

In 1974 the junta fell and a spirit of unbelievable and unfounded optimism spread among Greeks in general and Greek artists in particular.

Many musicians returned from abroad, some having studied with leading figures of the avant-garde.

Mikis Theodorakis also returned and was welcomed as a hero.

He gave a number of concerts in stadiums and other open-air venues to celebrate the return to democracy. The atmosphere of those concerts was unique. The audience was electrified, its participation absolute, its enthusiasm noble and sincere, its emotions moved to their extreme; thousands of strangers feeling like brothers.

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<sup>18</sup> The letter announcing to Alecos Xenos his dismissal is published in: Διονύσης Σέρρας, 'Χρονολόγιο για τον Αλέκο Ξένο', *Επτανησιακά Φύλλα*, xxv/3–4 (Autumn – Winter 2005), 410–450:437.

Iannis Xenakis returned to Athens in 1975, twenty-eight years after he had left the country. This fact transformed all the concerts of his music that he attended into highly moving events, culminating in the Polytope he presented in Mycaenes in 1978. It is not safe to speak of others' feelings, but my impression is that the public's reactions were quite similar at Theodorakis and Xenakis concerts.

I end my story at this high point. In those days it was regarded as one point of an ascending road. Today, we see it as the acme.



“A unique experience: the public of a performance in a Greek village in 1944”  
[photo by Dimitri Megalides]

*Кети Роману*

СТИЛ И ИДЕОЛОГИЈА:  
ХЛАДНОРАТОВСКА „СМЕША“ У ГРЧКОЈ  
(Резиме)

У раду се разматра искључивање грчког народа из државне историје, посебно из његове културне историје. Студија прати културну политику у Грчкој од Другог светског рата до пада војне хунте (1969–1974) – културну



политику обликовану под утицајем доминантних западних сила, међу којима су биле и земље које су из рата изашле као поражене. Немачка је имала улогу промотера нове западне (америчке) културе у Грчкој. Ауторка је желела да покаже како је Хладни рат фаворизово поражене западне земље, које су ефикасно учествовале у глобализацији америчке културе, с обзиром на то да је денацификација у западном свету била трансформисана у чишћење од комунизма.

Узимајући за пример Јаниса Ксенакиса (1922–2001), Микиса Теодоракиса (1925–) и Алекоса Ксеноса (1912–1995), тројицу композитора који су учествовали у грчком покрету отпора (а који су умногоме водили комунисти), ауторка указује на последице наведених феномена на грчки музички живот и стваралаштво.

Након Другог светског рата у Грчкој је уследио крвави грађански рат који је завршен 1949. године поразом комуниста. Педесетих година прошлог века отпочела је фаза „реhabилитације“ коју су спроводиле стране силе, међу којима су биле подједнако и оне које су крај рата дочекале као победнице и оне које су биле губитнице.

Маршалов план је окончан 1951, а економска стабилизација Грчке од тада се ослањала на Западну Немачку (земљу која је уништила грчку економију).

Немци су испословали да у замену за економску подршку добију тихо решавање проблема ратних злочина, као и слично тихог ширења њихових културних производа у Грчкој.

Огранак Гете института основан је у Атини 1952. године и из њега су се ширили џез и авангардна музика у Грчкој. У периоду од 1962. до 1965. неколико друштава савремене музике је основано у Атини.

Прву телевизијску станицу у Грчкој основале су Грчке оружане снаге 1966, као да су припремале долазак војне хунте наредне године и поспешивале њену пропаганду.

Отпочео је прогон људи који су заступали широк спектар политичких идеја, укључујући комунизам. Теодоракисова музика, иако је била забрањена у Грчкој, пратила је све протестне манифестације пре коначног слома хунте.

Сада знамо да је оптимизам који је завладао након пада хунте био неоснован.

(С енглеског превеле Весна Пено и Мелита Милин)

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